

Evidence on tap

Four years of thinking, testing, analysing, learning and testing again in the context of twelve different countries have led to great impact. Here you can read about the seven set targets for SchoolFood4Change's work on innovative public procurement and what participating cities have achieved together. Hopefully you find inspiration to take on some of the challenges and opportunities to create a new school food system.



School meals support sustainable food production



School meals are a key lever to support sustainable food production. The SchoolFood4Change (SF4C) targets on organic production and biodiversity protection recommend that at least 40% of food and drink products (by value, volume, or both) come from certified organic sources, alongside the inclusion of sustainability criteria that promote biodiversity, such as seasonal sourcing, reduced pesticide use, and support for agroecological practices.

Evidence

- Higher levels of organic sourcing have already been achieved across multiple SF4C cities, demonstrating that supporting organic agriculture through procurement tenders is a low hanging fruit. Reported shares include $\geq 65\%$ in Lyon, 75–80% in Nuoro, around 50% in Milan, and up to 92–100% in specific tenders in Copenhagen and Dordogne. In some cases, entire product categories such as dairy and flour were fully organic.
- Data from the online tool [Green Spoon](#), designed to measure the environmental and health impact of school meals, showed that 50% of the meals served in 765 monitored schools is organic food.
- These examples show that setting a 40% organic target is both realistic and achievable when supported by appropriate procurement strategies. As highlighted in the SchoolFood4Change Innovative Public Procurement Handbook, cities are already transforming procurement practices—reworking tenders, collaborating with suppliers, and mobilising stakeholders—to deliver higher-quality food at scale, reaching more than 3,200 schools.



School meals are tastier, more nutritious and in season



The SF4C Food Procurement Handbook recommends that 100% of food provided under contracts is traceable to its origin and subject to quality and taste testing prior to service. Fresh and seasonal products should be prioritised wherever feasible, taking into account cost, sustainability, nutritional value, and food waste considerations.

Evidence

- Evidence from the SchoolFood4Change project shows that cities have successfully increased regional sourcing and strengthened short food supply chains. Cities such as Lyon, Nuoro, and Malmö have explicitly focused on shorter supply chains through innovative procurement approaches, including Dynamic Purchasing Systems (DPS), market dialogues, and innovative procurement frameworks.
- Data from schools using the Green Spoon online tool showed that 39% of the products are sourced directly from local farmers, supporting sustainable food production.
- In some cases, contracting authorities prioritised local suppliers (e.g. Dordogne) or awarded points for regional sourcing and smaller contracts accessible to local farmers (e.g. Umeå). Enabling mechanisms included DPS (Malmö, Copenhagen), smaller lot structures and framework agreements (Dordogne), and procurement conditions favouring small-scale producers (Umeå), with some cases of direct purchasing from farmers. As a result, “thanks to SchoolFood4Change, 100 million healthier, fresher, more nutritious and sustainable school meals are served every year across partner and replication cities.”
- 70 chef trainers completed the pathway of the training of trainers. To date, the multiplication training reached 5,392 participants, incl. 2,406 cooks/ canteen staff, across 550 hours of training. 42 new plant-forward recipes resulted from this process. SF4C received 2,324 sensory test responses from children from 12 different countries.



School meals are more climate friendly



The greenhouse gas emissions associated with the production, transportation, consumption and disposal of food are measured and progressively reduced.

Evidence

In SchoolFood4Change (SF4C) cities, measures to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions were strengthened through the introduction of plant-based menus (e.g. meat-free days), sustainable sourcing criteria (e.g. pasture-fed livestock), and food waste reduction strategies. Across participating cities and regions, **greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions linked to school meals were reduced by 33% on average.**

- Quantified reductions were reported in several cities, including approximately 30–40% GHG reductions in Milan and Ghent.
- Other cities focused on implementing monitoring tools, such as Green Spoon, to track and guide progress. 765 schools using the Green Spoon recorded an average cut of their school meals' climate impact by 33%. In some cases GHG reductions ranging between 36% and 92% were achieved (Copenhagen, Ghent, Dordogne, Nuoro, Lyon, Leuven)



School meals reduce food poverty and inequality



All school children should have access to healthy, nutritious food, while surplus food is redistributed to disadvantaged communities in socially acceptable ways.

Evidence

- Universal free school meal systems in Sweden and Estonia demonstrate how public food provision can ensure equitable access to nutritious meals for all children. Within the SchoolFood4Change project, improvements in procurement standards have further enhanced meal quality, strengthening both nutritional outcomes and inclusivity.
- These examples show that when procurement criteria are raised—prioritising nutritious, high-quality food and enabling participation of small-scale and local producers—school meal systems can simultaneously improve diet quality and guarantee universal access. This highlights the role of public procurement not only as a tool for sustainability, but also as a key instrument for food equity and social inclusion.
- The online tool Green Spoon, that not only measure the environmental but also health impact of school meals showed that every additional €1 invested in transforming school food systems generated at least €2.50 in social, environmental and health-related benefits.
- Other data from the Green Spoon shows that 80% of 765 schools now offer free meals.



School meals are part of food education



Food education is firmly part of school meals, in particular through activities that are focused on healthy eating as a learning experience that involves active participation of pupils and teachers, and the wider school community.

Evidence

- More than 1200 schools are implementing a Whole School Food Approach (WSFA), integrating food education into their curricula and overall school culture.
- Around 400 schools have improved their nutritional standards, school food culture, and food education, achieving measurable results and earning bronze, silver or gold certification from SchoolFood4Change for their efforts as part of the WSFA.
- Across Europe, SchoolFood4Change schools hosted more than 100 Canteen Day Parties, uniting students, families, educators, and local communities around food education and building a shared culture of healthy, sustainable eating, reaching over 23,000 people in total.
- More than 200 schools have formed partnerships with nearby farms as part of SchoolFood4Change and, together with the farmers, organised educational visits to the farms.



School meals strengthen small farmers and vulnerable groups



At least 10% of food in school meals originates from small farmers or organisations employing disabled or disadvantaged workers.

Evidence

- SchoolFood4Change (SF4C) supported cities in increasing the share of food procured from small-scale farmers through targeted procurement strategies. The SF4C Food Procurement Handbook recommends practices such as splitting tenders into smaller lots to enable farmer participation, as demonstrated in Umeå, where seasonal vegetables were supplied directly by a local farmer to multiple schools.
- Cities also implemented Dynamic Purchasing Systems (DPS), as in Malmö, where procurement systems were adapted to source products such as potatoes from local farms, while also integrating food education activities, including farm visits for schoolchildren
- In addition, SF4C facilitated market dialogues involving farmers and producer organisations to improve mutual understanding and access to public procurement. All participating cities conducted at least one such dialogue, strengthening connections between public authorities and local food producers.



School meals strengthen small farmers and vulnerable groups



At least 50% of coffee, tea, sugar and exotic fruits that are being served originates from suppliers certified as Fair Trade including labels such as FairTrade, Ecocert Fair Trade, Fair for Life, or equivalent.

Evidence

- Fairtrade has proven to be one of the more easily implementable procurement targets, due to its **clear certification and verification systems**, which simplify compliance and monitoring within public tenders. As a result, several SchoolFood4Change (SF4C) cities achieved strong uptake, including Malmö, Umeå, Dordogne, and Milan including sourcing fair trade products such as cacao, coffee and bananas.
- According to Green Spoon data 54% of the schools are providing Fair Trade products.



[Click here for the Innovative and sustainable public procurement of healthy school meals: A practical handbook](#)

[Find more information at schoolfood4change.eu](https://schoolfood4change.eu)



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